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These Ikigai questions will help you find the true meaning of life

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9–12 minutes

With the help of the philosophy of ikigai (生き甲斐), you can find out what the meaning of your life is and what it is that's worth living for. This is made up of the characters for living (生き - iki) and value (甲斐 - gai) and can therefore be translated as something like the value or meaning of life. The Ikigai method is intuitive and individual, but you should still take a little time to come to grips with it. We'll show you which questions you need to answer to find your own purpose in life, which you can use to achieve happiness in your job and personal career.

At a glance

Ikigai (生き甲斐) is more than just a concept of life; it is the Japanese art of finding your own purpose in life. The philosophy shows how to achieve a fulfilled, happy life through self-reflection, mindfulness and conscious decisions. Between vocation, passion and social contribution lies the personal ikigai—the reason worth waking up for every day.

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Ikigai: What is it and what can it do?

Ikigai is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and is a philosophy for finding joy in life. Until the 1960s, ikigai (生き甲斐) was actually equated with shinigai (死にがい), which translates as 'what is worth dying for.' In military Japan, the meaning was initially related to the emperor and the nation. It wasn't until the economic upturn in the 1960s that the focus shifted to life, and the movement then spread to the West in the 1990s.

Ikigai stands for an all-encompassing philosophy of life that is supposed to lead to happiness and fulfilment in all areas of life. Have you ever thought about your personal purpose in life? Why do you wake up every morning? That's exactly what the Ikigai model is used for. The advantage of Ikigai is that it is a very intuitive model because there are basically only four questions that, when linked together, represent our purpose in life.

Ken Mogi and Ikigai: For those who want to learn more

When you start looking into Ikigai, one name keeps coming up: Ken Mogi. The Japanese neuroscientist explains the philosophy of ikigai

using scientific findings and inspiring life stories of real people. Through his experience with Japanese culture, his book *Ikigai: The Japanese Art of Living* provides a deep insight into the cultural roots of this philosophy.

He also discusses the five pillars of ikigai. Unlike the questions you ask yourself in order to arrive at your personal Ikigai, the five pillars of Ikigai are more of a basis that you need in order to be able to find out how to arrive at your purpose in life. In this way, you learn to perceive things around you differently and sharpen your awareness.

The five pillars of Ikigai

1. Start small
2. Learning to let go
3. Living in harmony and sustainability
4. Discovering the joy of small things
5. Being in the here and now

What is my ikigai?

Each of us has our own ikigai—an individual reason worth waking up for. Finding your own ikigai is a lengthy process that requires a lot of patience and time. You have to ask yourself personal questions and go deep within yourself to find the right answers. To fundamentally familiarise yourself with your own Ikigai, you need to understand and process a simplified form of life-spanning philosophy. Nobody wants to read seven books to understand the basic concept. That is why we are presenting a simplified form here via the four Ikigai questions

The four Ikigai questions to ask yourself

Ikigai is made up of four subject areas, which can be imagined as a circular diagram. In the centre of the diagram is the intersection of all

four areas—your own Ikigai. In addition, your deepest motivations and basic needs can be derived from the intersections of two neighbouring circles: passion, mission, vocation and profession.

Ikigai question 1: What do you like to do?

Turning your passion into a profession is the biggest dream for many. However, this area does not necessarily have to be related to a job; it is simply about what you like to do for the sheer joy of it, even without being paid for it. To find out which activity is your greatest passion, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What hobby excites you?
- What interests you so much that you want to deepen your knowledge of it in your free time?
- What activity never bores you?

Ikigai question 2: What does the world need from you?

People like to feel needed, so it's important to think about what the world is missing and how to fill that gap. Think in a political direction, but also very personally about your neighbourhood or family—what is missing?

- What are the most important things that are missing in your environment?
- What problems does society have?
- What problems would you like to solve?

Ikigai question 3: How can I earn money?

The Ikigai model was not originally intended to be applied to money, but if you want to survive in today's society, you have to earn a living somehow. That's why you have to think about how or with which business idea you can survive in the world.

- Which of your skills does society recognise as monetisable?
- How are you earning money at the moment?
- What are people willing to spend money on?

Ikigai question 4: What am I good and talented at?

Have you often been complimented on something you've done? For your Ikigai, it is also important to find out what skills you have that you can use to make a difference.

- Which activities are easy for you?
- What are you good at and what have you been trained for?
- What skills do you have that you could teach others?

Finding the right career and the perfect job with Ikigai

The basic needs of every person are derived from the intersections of the individual questions.

How to find your mission

Are you passionate about something and, at the same time, can use it to solve a problem in the world? If you love what you do and the world needs it, then you have found your mission.

How to find your calling

Do you help your fellow human beings through your work and receive recognition for it? If you do what the world needs and get paid for it, then you have found your calling.

How to find your profession

Are you a professional in your field and is there a job that pays well for it? If you're good at something and get paid for it, then you've found the perfect career.

How to find your passion

Something more private is your passion, away from money and finances. If you are good at something and love it, then you have found your passion.

How Ikigai helps you find your purpose in life

Are you wondering how Ikigai can help you personally? There are several reasons to question why you wake up every morning but we're listing them here again:

- You find your personal purpose in life and can feel more fulfilled as a result
- If you are unsure about your life, Ikigai can help you realign it
- Ikigai helps you understand why you and other people act the way they do
- Your abilities are used in the best possible way to enrich yourself and the world
- With your personal Ikigai, you can motivate yourself every day because you are doing what you love
- Your stress level can decrease once you have found your Ikigai
- You can apply the model to different areas of your life and find out more about yourself

How is ikigai pronounced?

Last but not least, a common question: Have I been pronouncing this Japanese word correctly in my head the whole time? Probably yes. Ikigai is pronounced relatively similarly to the Romanised spelling—in the spoken language it would be: **i / kʲiŋaiːi**. The emphasis is on the first 'i', with the second 'i' being lengthened. The 'k' is hard and the 'g' is

soft.

FAQ: Everything about Ikigai

What does ikigai mean?

Ikigai is made up of the Japanese words ‘iki’ (life) and ‘gai’ (value or meaning). It describes the individual meaning of life, which gives meaning and motivation to one’s existence.

How does the Ikigai model work?

The model is based on four central questions:
What do you love?
What does the world need?
What can you get paid for?
What are you good at? The intersection of these four areas forms your personal Ikigai—the point at which passion, vocation, mission and profession intersect.

Where does the Ikigai philosophy come from?

Ikigai has its roots in Japanese culture and was originally understood as the philosophy that allows you to understand the meaning and value of life. The neuroscientist Ken Mogi made the concept internationally known and explained it as a way to find contentment in everyday life through the five pillars of Ikigai: start small, let go, live in harmony, take pleasure in small things and be in the moment.

How do I find my Ikigai?

Honest self-reflection is worthwhile to discover your Ikigai. Answer the four key questions, write down your thoughts, observe what fulfills and inspires you. It’s not about perfection, but about clarity about what really makes you happy.

Can Ikigai help with my career?

Yes, many people use Ikigai to find their ideal career i.e. a job that brings joy, has social benefits, promotes talent and is financially viable. This creates a sustainable balance between success and meaningfulness.

What is the difference between ikigai and vocation?

Vocation is a part of Ikigai, but not the whole. Ikigai unites all areas of life—career, relationships, creativity and spirituality—and searches for the inner balance that connects everything.

How is Ikigai pronounced?

Ikigai is pronounced *i-ki-gai*, with emphasis on the first 'i'. The 'k' is hard, the 'g' soft - thus: [ˈikigai].

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